

**STATEMENT OF
THE AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION
TO THE
HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE
REGARDING HOMELAND SECURITY**

**Presented By
Bob Stallman
President**

June 26, 2002

Good morning I am Bob Stallman, President of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), which represents more than 5.1 million member families in the United States and Puerto Rico. Farm Bureau appreciates the opportunity to appear before the House Agriculture Committee regarding the President's initiative to create a Department of Homeland Security. This issue is extremely important and must be properly deliberated, debated and analyzed by numerous stakeholders.

We commend President Bush for his leadership on the issue of homeland security over the past nine months, and Governor Ridge for coordinating actions with the federal departments and agencies to protect the United States from future terrorist attacks. AFBF supports the mission of the proposed Homeland Security Department. The need to protect and reduce the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism and to assist in the recovery from terrorist attacks are goals that are vitally important to agriculture. Since the business of agriculture is to help ensure that every American has an abundant and safe food supply, the U.S. government must take steps to minimize or prevent terrorist activities that may be directed toward American agriculture.

The Department of Homeland Security proposal includes the transfer of the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) from the Department of Agriculture. Farm Bureau supports moving the portion of APHIS that administers laws relating to border protection activities to the new Department of Homeland Security. Utilizing these services to watch for intentional introductions of plant or animal disease serves an invaluable function in protecting our food production system. The economic damage caused by a contagious disease introduction could cost billions of dollars.

Farm Bureau is concerned that an agency whose primary function is to deal with terrorist activities might not employ adequate resources or funding on many of the other functions that are currently under APHIS jurisdiction. Since no "new" funding is anticipated for the Department of Homeland Security, we are concerned that funding for functions other than those that truly relate to homeland security would be severely curtailed. The domestic programs now in place at APHIS are of vital importance to agriculture.

By transferring all of APHIS to the new Department of Homeland Security, valuable programs would likely disappear. AFBF has worked diligently over the past several decades to help develop many of these programs to assist today's producers with a variety of production issues.

To see these programs face possible reduction or extinction is not good policy either for the government or for agricultural producers.

AFBF believes that careful additional consideration should occur before all of the APHIS functions are transferred to the new department. APHIS is a large agency with a well established and recognized responsibility in protecting agriculture from established and emerging diseases and pests. These programs do not fit within the stated function of the new agency -- to protect and respond to terrorist acts. Very few disease problems, or responses, have been due to terrorist activity. The vast majority of the problems which agriculture faces today, and with which APHIS presently deals, are unintentional introductions of plant and animal diseases. APHIS has jurisdiction over numerous other programs such as predator control, trade issues related to animal and plant health, the humane care and treatment of animals, veterinary certification, brucellosis, Johne's disease, Karnal bunt, citrus canker, trade-related issues with biotech crops and, wildlife services.

APHIS also provides a trade support mechanism to safeguard agriculture products against harmful foreign pests and disease. As other countries are improving their agriculture trade programs, the U.S. could be disassembling and possibly trying to rebuild a system that is already the envy of the world. This could cost us our place as a major agricultural exporter and supplier of the safest food products in the world.

Farm Bureau, along with other agricultural organizations, have prepared numerous questions on funding and operation of current programs within APHIS which may not meet the goals of the proposed Department. We hope to have the opportunity to discuss these questions and concerns with the Administration and Congress prior to the approval of a new Department, which may include some of the "non-Homeland Security programs." The creation of a new federal agency is a monumental task. As with any such venture, the law of unintentional consequences may apply. We want to ensure that such a creation will not weaken or destroy an integrated system that is quietly and efficiently working. Farm Bureau looks forward to working with Congress and the Administration on this monumental task and continuing the work of protecting our nation's food supply.